GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3400
ANSWERED ON:18.12.2015
Menstrual Hygiene
Dhruvanarayana Shri Rangaswamy;Jadhav Shri Sanjay Haribhau;Thakur Shri Anurag Singh

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government has taken cognizance of report by UNICEF that many girls in India drop out of school because of menstruation related problems;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto;

(c) whether the Government is cognitive of the taboo surrounding menstruation, especially in rural areas and if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether the Government conducted any survey or study regarding the same and access of sanitary pads amongst the country, if so, the details of key findings and recommendations and if not, the reasons therefor;

(e) the steps taken by the Government to bring awareness against tabooing of menstruation; and

(f) whether the Government runs any programmes regarding awareness in schools, colleges or with ASHA women in this regard and if so, the details thereof?

Answer

ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
(SHRI JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA)

(a) & (b): UNICEF has not shared any report with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on number of girls in India dropping out of school because of menstruation related problem.
However, there are two case studies related to menstrual hygiene available on UNICEF website.
Details of the above mentioned case studies are in Annexure A and B

(c): Yes, Government has taken cognizance of the taboos surrounding menstruation, especially in rural areas which have been noted through various studies and field visits.

Government is implementing Promotion of Menstrual Hygiene for Adolescent Girls (aged 10-19 years) in select districts across the country. The objectives of the scheme are:

â€¢ To increase awareness among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene.

â€¢ To increase access to and use of high quality sanitary napkins to adolescent girls in rural areas.

â€¢ To ensure safe disposal of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.
Easy access is ensured by the distribution of sanitary napkins by the ASHAs who have excellent access to the beneficiaries in the villages.

(d): No, Government has not undertaken any survey and study regarding the taboos surrounding menstruation and access to sanitary pads.

(e): Yes, Government of India has undertaken awareness programme against tabooing of menstruation in the form of communication materials such as posters, leaflets, mid media, audio- video and interpersonal communication materials.
Regular capacity building of frontline health workers is carried out under the scheme.

(f): ASHAs conduct a monthly meeting wherein issues pertaining to adolescent health including menstrual hygiene are discussed.

ANNEXURE A

Case Study by Sugata Roy
(Source : http://unicef.in/Story/122/Menstrual-Hygiene-Key-to-Keeping-Girls-in-School# sthash. NAP0qqeL.dpuf)
Krishnagiri, India, 19 March 2011 − Asha, a topper in her class, would have been a school dropout, for a reason which will be surprising to most of the students in urban areas. Her continuous struggle to attend schools during her menstruation cycle almost cost her dream to complete her studies.
Culturally here in southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu as in many other parts of India, menstruation is considered dirty and impure and during periods girls are discouraged to attend school and stay at homes. The unavailability of sanitary pads, inadequate sanitation and absence of separate toilet for girls in schools, compounds the problem and has a huge impact on girls school attendance and is a major reason for dropouts of girls from schools. "There was no privacy to change when required and I was hesitant to seek permission to go home. The agonising pain, cramps and shame almost forced me to stay away from school," says Asha recounting her tough days.
"Over two-third girls studying in standard 8 and 9 skipped schools during their periods. This hampered their studies and eventually one-third of these girls would drop-out," remarks George Jessunesan, headmaster of Asha's M.C.Palli Girls High School.For some parents this stage also signals a sign of maturity for girls and time to get them married. "My parents wanted me to leave studies and get married," adds Asha, now studying in standard XI.
Interventions in the schools

Identifying sanitation and hygiene as the need of the hour, Sarva Siksha Abiyan (SSA), Government of Tamil Nadu and UNICEF initiated the Menstrual Hygiene and Management (MHM) intervention in eight high schools in Krishnagiri in 2009.
"Improve sanitation facilities along with adequate hygiene services have great impact on improving girls' attendance," explains Arun Dobhal, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Specialist at UNICEF.
The programme focussed on the capacity building of adolescent girl students like to Asha to demystify taboos surrounding menstruation, orienting them to manage the menstrual process, provide access to sanitary napkins and disposal of soiled ones.
UNICEF has developed the counselling kit and has designed low cost incinerator attached to the girls' toilet for the disposal of soiled napkins in the schools.
"A counselling team consisting of two female teachers and four students reach out to girls with correct information and skills to manage their periods. The benefits of using sanitary napkins over cloth as absorbents are discussed," informs Jessunesan.
"Through intensive one-on-one counselling process, the myths and taboos on menstruation stand dispelled."
Sanitary napkin vending machines have been installed in schools to promote privacy and easy access. Now girls can easily access their requirement during school hours.
"Counselling team informed us about the use of sanitary pads, which are hygienic and comfortable. I can easily access them along with my friends from the vending machine installed in our school. Its only two rupees" acknowledges Asha, now an important member of the counselling team in her school.
Improved water and sanitation facilities in school girls' toilets including the incinerator for the safe disposal of soiled napkins have shown its impact on the school attendance.
"After the programme has been introduced in the school, the dropout and absenteeism has come down to near zero and the performance of the students have improved," says Jessunessan. Supporting her headmater's claim, Asha echoes the programme has indeed saved her from discontinuing my studies.

Empowered girls carry message to households

The impact of the menstrual hygiene management programme can also be felt in the community. The girls feel empowered to carry the messages on hygiene practice into their households and community.
"We could break the culture of silence and feel free to discuss the issue with our mother, elder sisters and other girls in our community. We are able to guide girls in our community and schools in their preparation for their first menstruation cycle. We feel empowered," expressed Ramiah, a member of the school counselling team and a friend of Asha.
Girls have managed to dispel myths and discussion on menstruation is no more a taboo, informed K.L.Selvarani, science teacher and a member of counselling team in M.C. Palli high school. "Girls are able to discuss the issue freely with their family members."
Demanding the need for privacy for managing their periods, girls like Asha and Ramiah, could convince their parents to construct toilet at home.
"Over thirty families have constructed toilets in their homes after persistent demand from the girls. These girls are slowly bringing a social change in their community," confirms Selvarani.

Scaling Up
The menstrual hygiene programme has been linked with the life skills training programme in the schools with active involvement of female teachers. To provide a caring environment for menstrual hygiene separate toilets with incinerators are being constructed in the schools. The issue needs be discussed to break the culture of silence and set aside the myths and fallacies.
The interventions in the M.C. Palli High School have demonstrated that confidence and capability to handle the menstrual process without fear and discomfiture and this empowers the adolescent girls to a significant extent, emphasizes Arun Dobal.
The model intervention in M. C. Palli has triggered Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Government of Tamil Nadu to scale up of the programme in 150 high schools in Krishnagiri.

(Source : http://unicef.in/Story/122/Menstrual-Hygiene-Key-to-Keeping-Girls-in-School# sthash. NAP0qqeL.dpuf)

ANNEXURE B
A Case Study by Sangeetha Rajeesh
(Source: http://unicef.in/Story/573/Menstrual-Hygiene-and-the-girl-child-A-Case-Study#sthash.WGDqYURa.dpuf)
Deepika is seen dropping the Rs 2/- coin in the sanitary napkin vending machine. The thirteen-year-old is unprepared for the onset of her menstrual periods. Yogeshwari, her friend and classmate has accompanied her to the staffroom. Deepika is terribly embarrassed but is relieved to avail of a sanitary napkin in time. This is the common case with most adolescent girls her age and the napkin vending machine in the school premises is a blessing in disguise.

"Menstrual cycles begin at the tender age of ten for many girls and in the rural areas, keeping them in school is a challenge," explains Banumathy, Assistant Headmistress, Nemmeli School, "particularly if they have come unprepared." She says that the napkin vending machine sponsored by UNICEF and Shri Cheema Foundation, a CSR initiative by TVS Electronics Ltd is a boon to the girl students. The community in and around Kancheepuram District are low income groups and cannot afford sanitary napkins and so the adolescent girls use the age-old cloth method. But now, the Tiruvidenthai Akshaya Self Help Group manufacture and supply low cost sanitary pads for just Rs 2 and these are being used in the vending machine. The school also has an incinerator for the safe disposal of sanitary waste installed by the Tamil Nadu Government in 2004 under Total Sanitation Campaign.

"When the doctors first came to speak on menstruation, we were all very shy and did not know how to clarify our doubts," reflects Seetha of Class IX B, looking at her batch mates, "but when they started talking about how important it is to keep ourselves clean, I realised that I wasn't doing the things I ought to do."

Menstruation in India has always been accompanied by myths and taboos and adolescent girls find it difficult to even discuss the issue with parents or elders in the family. Most of them turn to their teaching staff for advice on menstrual hygiene. "The girls feel comfortable asking us questions and we are glad to help," smiles Banumathy. Shri Cheema Foundation conducted classes on menstrual hygiene and dealing with puberty for classes VIII to XI at Nemmeli School and the students have benefited from it.

Mohana is fourteen and her menstrual cycle began when she was barely ten years old. "I have been using cloth as pads till then and I used to wash them for reuse," she says embarrassed, "but after I heard the trainers speak on the harmful effects, I switched over to sanitary napkins." In fact, Mohana takes home five sanitary napkins from the vending machine during her menstrual cycle!

The girl students of the rural school are now aware of the reproductive tract infections and of the menstrual hygiene practices that need to be followed during the menstrual days. "I used to change my napkin after 12 hours but now I have realised the importance of changing it at least every 5 hours from the talk the doctors gave us," twelve-year-old Rajeswari tells us.

Nemmeli School girl students have understood that personal hygiene especially during the menstrual cycle is even more vital and have decided not to go back to their earlier unhygienic habits.

(Source: http://unicef.in/Story/573/Menstrual-Hygiene-and-the-girl-child-A-Case-Study#sthash. WGDqYURa.dpuf)